TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TO GLOBAL LEVELS OF RELEVANCE THROUGH EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND ENABLING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Dr. Meshach Muruwei[1], Dr. Obhedo Gabriel Okpana[2]

[1]Department of Arts Education Niger Delta University Wilberforce Island Bayelsa State
[2]Department of Educational Foundations Niger Delta University Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State

*Corresponding author: Dr. Meshach Muruwei

Department of Arts Education Niger Delta University Wilberforce Island Bayelsa State

Abstract

This paper explores the role of effective teaching and an enabling learning environment in driving educational transformation to meet global standards. It highlights key factors such as the integration of ICT, adequate funding, skilled educators, relevant curriculum materials, well-equipped classrooms, and a conducive environment as essential elements for achieving educational transformation. The paper also examines various qualities of an effective teacher, including preparedness, clarity, patience, effective communication, and the use of diverse media in lesson delivery. Recommendations are provided, emphasising the importance of a collaborative effort among education stakeholders to ensure the provision of essential infrastructure, creating appealing classroom environments, and the need for strong political will from the government to support educational reforms.

Introduction

Education remains the most invaluable legacy a nation can bestow upon its citizens, particularly the youth, as it plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic and cultural development of any society. It is widely acknowledged that education fosters individual growth and national advancement, making it an essential tool for shaping the values, norms, and attitudes that are deemed acceptable within a community. Every parent aspires to see their child excel academically and internalise socially constructive behaviours; no parent delights in witnessing their child deviate from societal expectations. Education, therefore, serves as a conduit for transmitting what is considered worthwhile across generations. It encompasses the totality of an individual's experiences that lead to the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of intellect. This educational process unfolds through informal, formal, and non-formal means, guiding the child to become a well-rounded, productive member of society.

Fundamentally, education is the engine through which societies generate the knowledge and competencies necessary for survival and continuity. According to Kazeem and Ige (2010), education enhances the quality of life and delivers far-reaching social benefits to both individuals and the wider community. Its significance cannot be overstated, as it lays the groundwork for economic prosperity, social advancement, and individual well-being.

Historically, education has always served as a vehicle for preserving cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge, and inculcating social values across generations.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria, in its National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), affirms that education is the most strategic investment for the rapid development of the country's human, political, and economic resources. The fundamental mission of educational institutions is to facilitate learning and teaching. Prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960, research indicates that the education sector was dominated by private institutions with minimal government involvement. However, recognising the limitations of these private establishments, especially after the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970, the government took proactive steps to take over private schools and establish more public institutions to ensure standardisation and quality control in education delivery (Kalagbor, 2016).

Despite these interventions, Nigeria continues to grapple with challenges in elevating the quality of instruction and academic performance in its schools. Academic achievement is commonly assessed through students' performance in examinations, teacher evaluations, and scores in specific academic subjects. A renowned Nigerian educationist and former Minister of Education, Professor A. Fafunwa, defined education as "the aggregate of all the processes by which an individual develops abilities, attitudes, and behaviours that are of positive value to the society in which they

24

WAR .J. Arts. Humanit. Soc. Sci. Vol – 1 Issue - 1 (2025) PP: 24-28

live" (Stienen, 2017). In a similar vein, Fafunwa (1974) asserted that education includes all deliberate or incidental efforts made by a society to achieve goals that address both individual and collective needs. Given the dynamic nature of modern societies and the rapid pace of technological advancement, it has become imperative to reform educational systems to meet evolving global standards. This requires the formulation of responsive policies and the design of forward-looking educational programmes that drive national transformation while safeguarding future needs.

Oluwagbohunmi (2013) supports this perspective, positing that education equips individuals with intellectual and practical skills vital for human capital development. Therefore, transforming education involves aligning national educational systems with globally accepted standards in areas such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT), sustainable funding, skilled human resources, modernised curricula, and conducive learning environments. Adequate funding is especially crucial, encompassing sufficient budget allocations for infrastructure development, procurement of learning facilities, and professional development for educators. Regrettably, Nigeria has struggled to meet these funding requirements. As observed by Sunday and Ochube (2014), the nation's financial commitment to education remains insufficient. Similarly, Uzoh, Dike, and Dike (2011) lament the chronic underfunding of the sector, which has hindered the realisation of its full potential as a catalyst for national development.

Despite the continuous rise in education-related expenditures, Nigeria has consistently failed to meet the minimum benchmark recommended by UNESCO for the education sector. The country's budgeting process has been widely criticised as inefficient, riddled with wastage, and plagued by imprecise and careless estimates. This inefficiency is largely attributed to a systemic lack of accountability, where financial allocations are rarely treated with the seriousness they deserve. As a result, the education sector remains underfunded and ill-equipped to compete globally.

To elevate Nigeria's education system to internationally competitive standards, there must be a strategic shift toward Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Nzewi (2009) emphasises that ICT represents a powerful tool capable of transforming and enhancing the quality of education in any nation. He further asserts the importance of adopting and integrating modern technologies within educational systems, particularly in the training of teachers who are expected to drive innovative instructional practices. The transition from analogue to digital technologies has catalysed global transformations in nearly all facets of life, including education. Consequently, educational objectives must evolve to ensure that teachers are competent and adaptable in the use of ICT tools.

At the core of educational transformation lies effective teaching, which begins with meticulous planning. An effective teacher develops lesson plans that are anchored on clear objectives, selects relevant content and learning experiences, and chooses appropriate instructional materials. Lesson delivery involves employing suitable teaching methods, managing the classroom effectively, and utilising instructional resources meaningfully. Evaluation is the final step, where teachers assess learning outcomes to determine the extent to which educational objectives have been achieved.

According to Mbakwem (2014), effective teaching is the process that engenders desirable changes through dynamic interactions among teachers, students, and peers. Mbakwem (2001) also highlights essential elements that contribute to teacher effectiveness, including confidence, strong communication and organisational skills, creativity, enthusiasm, resourcefulness, and mastery of pedagogical techniques.

A supportive and enabling learning environment is equally vital to effective teaching. As defined by Okey (2014), this environment encompasses the physical classroom, its surrounding neighbourhood, the general classroom climate, and the quality and availability of learning materials and infrastructure. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) recommends an ideal teacher-pupil ratio of 1:35 for primary schools and 1:40 for secondary schools to ensure effective instruction. This recommendation underscores the need for educational institutions to create conducive, friendly, and resource-rich environments if they are to realise globally relevant standards. As the central implementer of the curriculum, the teacher must be well-trained and skilled to operate effectively in a competitive global context. Accordingly, this discourse identifies effective teaching and a conducive learning environment as foundational pillars for meaningful educational transformation.

Effective Teaching

Despite its centrality to educational success, the concept of effective teaching has received limited scholarly attention, with most existing research concentrating on students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness. Paulley (2019) argues that while teaching is essential, what distinguishes transformative education in the 21st century is not merely the act of teaching, but the ability to do so effectively and efficiently. The ultimate aim of teaching is to facilitate learning in alignment with the objectives set by the educational institution. This goal can only be achieved if teachers are competent, impactful, and efficient in the discharge of their duties. Effective educators thus become catalysts for social change, national development, and improved academic standards. The teaching process comprises several dimensions, including the physical and psychological atmosphere of the classroom—whether traditional or non-traditional, such as field-based experiences—teacher behaviour, student engagement, curriculum structure, and assessment procedures. Effective teaching is therefore not a singular act but a composite of actions and interactions that collectively influence learning outcomes.

Abimbola (2009) defines effective teaching as a dynamic process in which the teacher facilitates learning by managing the interplay between students' interests, the instructional content, the chosen methods, and available teaching materials. It involves imparting knowledge, skills, and values with the intent that learners will not only internalise the content but also apply it in ways that reflect meaningful behavioural and intellectual change. As such, effective teaching stands as a cornerstone of educational quality, serving as the vehicle through which institutions attain their instructional objectives and broader developmental goals.

Qualities of an Effective Teacher

The importance of the teacher in the process of educational transformation cannot be overstated. As a pivotal figure in the

25

WAR .J. Arts. Humanit. Soc. Sci. Vol – 1 Issue - 1 (2025) PP: 24-28

educational system, the teacher's influence extends far beyond the delivery of content; he or she is central to fostering meaningful learning experiences. For effective teaching and learning to occur, several interrelated factors must be present—the teacher, the learner, the learning environment, and the curriculum materials. However, the competencies required for teaching transcend subject-matter expertise. An effective teacher must possess the ability to engage learners meaningfully and guide them toward new perspectives and understandings of the world.

A hallmark of an effective teacher is the ability to adapt instructional strategies to suit both the nature of the content and the diverse learning styles of students. This flexibility acknowledges that students learn in varying ways and that instruction must be responsive to their individual needs. Below are some essential attributes that characterise an effective teacher:

1. **Thorough Preparation**: An effective teacher enters the classroom well-prepared. This involves reviewing key concepts, clarifying complex ideas, and determining the most appropriate methods for delivering content. Preparation also entails developing lesson outlines, designing instructional materials, and producing diagrams, handouts, or multimedia tools ahead of time. Such planning enhances lesson coherence and student engagement.

2. **Clarity in Communication**: The ability to explain difficult or abstract concepts in simple, understandable language is a defining quality of effective teaching. Teachers must also help students become familiar with and confident in using the discipline-specific language, enabling them to think and communicate fluently within the subject area.

3. **Patience and Tolerance**: Effective teachers recognise that learning is a gradual process. They give students sufficient time to reflect, ask questions, and learn from their mistakes. Rather than assigning blame when students struggle, they offer support and encouragement, creating a positive atmosphere conducive to growth.

4. **Excellent Communication Skills**: Beyond the classroom, a teacher's ability to communicate effectively with parents, colleagues, and school administrators is essential. Open and constructive communication fosters collaboration, reinforces trust, and supports the learner's overall development.

5. **Proactive Planning**: Successful teachers anticipate potential challenges and devise solutions in advance, rather than reacting only when problems arise. This foresight reduces classroom stress and ensures a smoother teaching and learning process.

6. **Integration of Varied Media**: In this digital era, incorporating diverse instructional media is not optional but essential. Modern students are immersed in technology, and teachers who incorporate videos, digital simulations, interactive tools, and multimedia presentations into their lessons are more likely to capture students' interest and promote active learning.

7. **Caring Disposition**: An effective teacher demonstrates genuine care for students' well-being. Building personal yet professional relationships with students can significantly enhance motivation and academic performance. As Rumnarayan and Rao (2004) suggest, a warm and friendly teacher-student relationship facilitates the effective transfer of knowledge and positively influences students' academic outcomes.

8. **Passion for the Profession**: Perhaps the most critical attribute of an effective teacher is a deep passion for teaching. Teachers who are genuinely enthusiastic about their work inspire the same enthusiasm in their students. On the contrary, a lack of commitment or interest can quickly erode a teacher's effectiveness, regardless of other strengths.

In sum, the effectiveness of a teacher is not confined to pedagogical techniques alone, but is reflected in a holistic combination of preparation, adaptability, communication, care, and professional passion. These qualities collectively foster a dynamic and enriching learning environment—one that is essential for driving educational transformation in a globally competitive world.

Enabling Learning Environment

An enabling learning environment, equipped with modern audio-visual and digital technologies, plays a pivotal role in enhancing the teaching and learning process. Such an environment encompasses not only the physical arrangement of classrooms but also extends to outdoor settings like fieldwork, thereby promoting experiential learning. More importantly, it includes the psychosocial climate of the learning space. Educational institutions that are free from frequent incidences of misconduct, disorder, bullying, and illegal activities are far more conducive to academic success than those plagued by cultism, drug abuse, and examination malpractice. In this context, the nature of interactions among students, and between teachers and students, becomes a defining feature of the learning environment.

At all levels of education, learning environments are shaped by varying perspectives and institutional interpretations. Each school constructs its understanding of what constitutes a productive learning atmosphere. Nonetheless, the theoretical and practical foundation for any effective learning environment must be rooted in sound educational principles, as defined by experts in the field. Since the concept of the learning environment evolved from educational practice, it is essential to understand its theoretical underpinnings and tailor its implementation to suit the unique context of each educational institution.

The school environment, particularly the classroom, significantly influences the acquisition of academic knowledge. Ani and Chukwudi (2015) assert that the classroom serves as the nucleus of teaching and learning—where face-to-face interactions and the realisation of educational objectives primarily occur. It is in this space that students are brought together to pursue the goals of education, making it, metaphorically, the teacher's "operational theatre," where professional success or failure may be determined. A well-structured classroom fosters learner autonomy by offering opportunities for students to engage in self-directed, inquiry-based activities, thus nurturing independence and critical thinking.

26

WAR .J. Arts. Humanit. Soc. Sci. Vol – 1 Issue - 1 (2025) PP: 24-28

Bloom, as cited in Muruwei, Konye, and Akuma (2015), defines the learning environment as a complex network of conditions, stimuli, and forces that influence an individual's learning journey. These may be physical, social, or intellectual in nature. This conceptualisation underscores the environment as a dynamic system of interacting elements that collectively shape the learner's experience. Ogbonnaya (2003) further expands this view by identifying a variety of contexts—homes, schools, religious institutions, markets, farms, offices, museums, and even motor parks—as valid learning environments, emphasising that education is not confined to the classroom alone.

The Nigerian child is exposed to multiple environments, including the home, school, community, and the broader society, all of which significantly impact their development and learning rights. While all these spaces play critical roles, the school remains a fundamental site for formal knowledge acquisition. Brook (1982) describes school learning as the sum of all experiences within the child's immediate educational environment, including institutional norms, systemic expectations, and the ways pupils are grouped and engaged. Within this context, the classroom becomes more than just a physical space; it is where learners acquire essential life skills required for global competence and success.

Given the school's central role in preparing the next generation for societal contribution, deliberate efforts must be made to create environments that foster creativity, collaboration, and academic excellence. When learning spaces are poorly structured or inadequately managed, they risk stifling innovation and hindering student potential. Thus, every precaution must be taken to ensure that the classroom supports—not inhibits—the developmental and intellectual growth of learners.

Conclusion

Undeniably, effective teaching and a conducive learning environment form the bedrock of any successful educational reform. For Nigeria's education system to attain global standards of excellence and relevance, a comprehensive transformation is imperative. It is therefore incumbent upon all stakeholders—policymakers, educators, administrators, parents, and the broader community—to commit to this transformative journey. Through collective effort and strategic investment in both human and environmental educational resources, a lasting and impactful legacy can be built for generations to come.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward to enhance the effectiveness of education:

1. There should be a concerted effort among all education stakeholders, including government, educators, and the private sector, to develop the necessary infrastructure that will make learning environments conducive and fully equipped for modern educational needs.
2. The classroom environment should be consistently designed and maintained to be inviting and engaging for students. Creating a stimulating and well-organised learning space will encourage greater student participation and focus.
3. The government must demonstrate strong political will to drive the educational system towards achieving

excellence. This commitment should be reflected in policy formulation, adequate funding, and the implementation of reforms aimed at improving educational standards.

4. Teachers should undergo regular training and professional development programmes to ensure they stay current with innovative teaching methods and technologies. Continuous professional development will help educators adapt to new teaching paradigms and improve their instructional effectiveness.

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27

WAR .J. Arts. Humanit. Soc. Sci. Vol – 1 Issue - 1 (2025) PP: 24-28

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28

WAR .J. Arts. Humanit. Soc. Sci. Vol – 1 Issue - 1 (2025) PP: 24-28